During the visit, the issue of additional routes for the Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra was also discussed with the Chinese side. The Chinese side conveyed that they would consider the request according to conditions in Tibet.

Indian joint ventures in Iraq

513. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that USA and UK have approached India or *vice-versa* for setting up joint ventures in Iraq after the lifting of sanctions in Iraq;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government have sought MFN status from the new Goverment in Iraq; and

(d) if so, the response of the Iraq Government?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) No.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) No.

(d) Does not arise.

Ties with Central Asian Republics

514. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be please to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have been able to re-establish its traditional ties with Central Asian Republics through the re-opening of the Silk Route;

(b) if so, the significant achievements made during the year 2002-2003; and

(c) the prospects envisaged during 2003-2004?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) India has been able to strengthen its relationship with the Central Asian Republics in all sectors particularly political, economic, defence and culture, in the last two years. During his visit to Kazakhstan in June, 2002, Hon'ble Prime Minister made the following reference to Silk Route at a Press Conference on June 5,2002;

"India wishes to strengthen her ties with all the countries of the region, imparting a multi-dimensional character to them. I would call it the new 'Silk Route Initiative' of India's Foreign Policy. It will seek to build a new Silk Road of Friendship and Cooperation between India and Central Asia" Hon'ble Prime Minister's reference evoked the historic Silk Route that existed between Asia & Europe since antiquity.

(b) Following were the achievements during 2002-2003:

The exchange of visits at a political level were intensified significantly. Kazakh President H.E. Mr. Nursultan Abishevich visited India in February, 2002. Kyrgyz President H.E. Mr. Askar Akaev visited in August, 2002. At the invitation of the Government of India, Young Parliamentarians from Central Asian countries visited India in April, 2002. Parliamentary delegations from all the five Central Asian Republics visited in January, 2003 in connection with the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Indian Parliament. H.E. Mr. S.S. Gulyamov, Uzbek Minister of High and Secondary Specialised Education visited India 7-10 January, 2003. H.E. Mr. Abdulaziz Khafizovich Kamilov, Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan visited India from 3-4 February, 2003.

Hon'ble Prime Minister visited Kazakhstan in June, 2002. Smt. Vasundhara Raje, MoS(SSI) visited Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in April, 2002. Raksha Mantri Shri George Fernandes led a defence delegation to Dushanber (Tajikistan) in April, 2002. Shri Vinod Khanna, MoS (Tourism & Culture) visited Kyrgyzstan (October, 2002). Shri Yashwant Sinha, EAM visited Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan from January 28th to February 1, 2003. Raksha Mantri Shri George Fernandes led a defence delegation to Uzbekistan from 28th February to 2nd March, 2003.

Industrial exhibitions: A series of industrial exhibitions were held through Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) in Kazakhstan,

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in April—August, 2002. A consumer goods show was also held in Kyrgyzstan in July, 2003.

Aid Projects: Humanitarian Assistance worth US$ 5 million was delivered to Tajikistan in August, 2002. 10 TATA SAFARI four wheel vehicles were gifted in October, 2002 for Global Mountain Summit held in Bishkek(Kyrgyzstan). Turkmen-Indian Industrial Centre at Ashgabat (Turkmenistan) funded by Government of India at a cost of Rs. 2.7 crores, was completed by Hindustan Machine Tools (1) and handed over to Turkmenistan in December, 2002.

Defence Cooperation: Bilateral relations in the Defence Sector have been further strengthened in the region.

Cultural: A Cultural Centre in our Mission in Tajikistan was inaugurated by EAM in January, 2003 during his visit to Tajikistan.

Civil Aviation: For the first time all CA States now have air links with India.

Joint Working Group to Combat Terrorism: India has signed Agreement to set up Joint Working Groups to Combat Terrorism with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

(c) Prospects for 2003-2004 include further political level visits, from/to some of the Central Asian Republics. Economic interactions i.e. setting up of Joint Ventures, projects under Government of India Credit Lines, cooperation in the field of pharmaceuticals, hydro carbons, construction and IT Sector, are being explored. A Food Processing Plant for Kyrgyzstan and a fruit processing plant in Tajikistan are proposed to be set up under Government of India's aid programme. The establishment of an IT institute for higher learning in Kyrgyzstan, besides Tajikistan and Uzbekistan is also being planned. Cultural Exchange Programmes are being reviewed/finalized. Agreements with other CA States to set up Joint Working Group on Terrorism are also under active consideration.

Humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan

515. SHRI RUMANDLA RAAMACHANDRAYYA:
SHRIMATI N.P. DURGA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state: